



SUPERFUND RECORDS

Missouri Wilderness PRICELESS AND RARE TOO

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The second coming of the Forest Services roadless area review and evaluation RARE II gave unusual purpose to my friends endless wanderings through Missouri's woodlands. They accepted the challenge find map describe and submit to the federal government a list of all qualified pristine places.

We first thought the RARE II process was another exercise of bureaucratic tedium aimed at keeping concerned citizens busy but not effective. But we soon realized that the RARE II process would force us to completely inventory Missouri's wilderness resources and provide us with a vehicle to rally public support for what we found.

Our explorations taught us that we still have a few small wild areas remaining unharmed in Missouri.

The Irish Wilderness for example is the largest expanse of roadless land left intact in Missouri. Its 17,562 acres of untrammelled beauty and abundant wildlife make it Missouri's cardinal wilderness proposal.

Father John Hogan, an Irish Catholic priest who helped Irish immigrants settle in the area during the 1850s, best described the wilderness in 1892. The quiet solitariness of the place seemed to inspire devotion. Nowhere could the human soul so profoundly worship as in the depths of that leafy forest beneath the swaying branches of the lofty oaks and pines where solitude and the heart of man united in praise and wonder of the Great Creator.

Eighty-seven years later a couple of friends and I took Friends of the Earth's founder David Brower into Father Hogan's leafy forest. We found it equally inspiring.

The day began by canoeing up Whites Creek which drains the Irish Wilderness before it empties into the Eleven Point National Scenic River near the Missouri-Arkansas border. After paddling a short distance upstream, we had to tie our canoes to a sycamore tree because the creek loses its water through its own sieve-like gravel bottom.

As everyone made the necessary preparations for land travel I pondered how fortunate we were to show David Brower, one of the world's leading wilderness proponents, Missouri's finest roadless resource. My friends seemed to share my anxious anticipation of Dave's reaction.

His apparent affection for the area was first displayed when we stopped to watch butterflies darting haphazardly among the pale purple coneflowers which grow sparingly along the trail. Eventually we crossed the dry bed of Whites Creek just 300 yards uphill from where our canoes floated.

Further on we found the same creek flowing on the surface once again.

But it doesn't run unhampered for long because beaver dams block its course. We stopped at a deep still pool behind one of the dams to gaze at the reflection of the eerie limestone crags which line the opposite bank. Dave seemed eager for more.

In time the trail led us to Fiddler's Spring where we stopped for a cool drink. Dave peeked lovingly under the arched runner of a walking fern to see if its end had sunk new roots into the large moss-covered boulder above the spring. It seemed like he didn't want to leave.

Before completing the loop which would eventually

lead us back to our canoes we descended into the huge central chamber of Whites Creek Cave. Looking back nearly 500 yards at the cave's elliptical opening we noticed how an oak tree on the outside filters the sun's rays like a stained glass window and how the moisture in the subterranean air creates beams of light which give every onyx formation a delicate luminescence.

The Irish performed well for us that day. It deserved Dave's praise. The whole experience makes it easier for me to honor his request to defend its natural integrity.

Similar outings can be experienced at Missouri's thirteen other wilderness proposals.

The 6830-acre Devil's Backbone area east of Springfield takes its name from a long narrow ridge known as the Devil's Backbone. Beautiful wild azaleas grow along the banks of the North Fork of the White River which flows through the area. The Devil's Backbone is one of the few places in Missouri where a Wilderness area can be designated by Congress on both sides of a floatable river.

Swan Creek, a 6945-acre area southwest of Springfield, is a rugged part of the Ozark Highland. Fox, bobcat and collared lizards depend on the area for shelter and food. Normally collared lizards which run on their hind legs like miniature dinosaurs inhabit the arid southwest. But the dry limestone glades in Swan Creek offer an acceptable dominion.

Spring Creek is an area known for its springs, clear streams and numerous waterfalls. It offers the best beaver habitat of any wilderness proposal in Missouri.

All of our wilderness proposals lie within the Ozarks. You can find this region of the world by locating the only sizable bump on a relief map between the Rockies and the Appalachians. The Ozarks is completely